

5. At what point do Kathy's and Lester's actions depart from the path of a simple desire for justice and move into something else? Why can neither of them seem to act rationally? Does Behrani act rationally?

6. Does Lester drink to break free of a sense of deadness, or to anesthetize himself? Why does he risk his family life as well as his professional life for his involvement with Kathy? Is he attempting to reinvigorate his life, or is he unconsciously seeking to destroy himself?

7. Note the epigraph to the novel, from "The Balcony" by Octavio Paz: "Beyond myself/somewhere/I wait for my arrival." How does it apply to the problems of self and alienation in each of the three main characters? Who has the clearest sense of his or her identity? What does it mean to have a clear sense of self?

8. Describing the success of her recovery program, Kathy says, "I had already stopped wanting what I'd been craving off and on since I was fifteen, for Death to come take me the way the wind does a dried leaf out on its limb" [p. 46]. How does the novel affect your response to the social and psychological issues of addiction, depression, and suicide? Do you find yourself being understanding or judgmental of Kathy as the stress of the conflict increases? Is she actually more of a survivor than she thinks she is?

9. Is Behrani's wife, Nadereh, an admirable character? Does her feminine role in a very traditional marriage reduce her importance as an actor in this drama? Does she have qualities that are missing in Behrani, Kathy, and Lester?

10. Behrani tells his son, "Remember what I've told you of so many Americans: they are not disciplined and have not the courage to take responsibility for their actions. If these people paid to us the fair price we are asking, we could leave and she could return. It is that simple. But they are like little children, son. They want things only their way" [p. 172]. How accurate is his perception of Americans? How well does it apply to Kathy and Lester?

11. How does *House of Sand and Fog* highlight the conflict between downwardly mobile Americans and upwardly mobile recent immigrants? What role does racism play in the reaction of Americans and foreigners to each other?

12. Why has Kathy avoided telling her mother and brother the truth about her situation? Does their meeting at the end of the novel resolve any of Kathy's difficult feelings about her place in the family?

13. Should Behrani be held responsible, on some level, for the crimes and excesses of the Shah's regime? Is he responsible for Esmail's fate?



House of Sand and Fog by Andre Dubus III



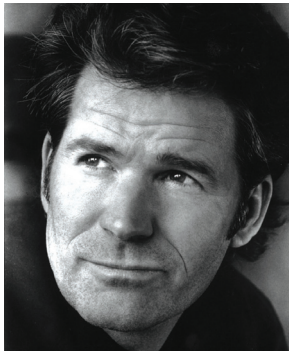
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Andre Dubus III Biography

Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Detroit: Gale, 2009.

Literature Resource Center



Personal Information: Born September 11, 1959, in Oceanside, CA; son of Andre II (a fiction writer and educator) and Patricia (a social worker) Dubus; married Fontaine Dollas (a dancer), June 25, 1989. Education: Bradford College, A.A., 1979; University of Texas at Austin, B.A., 1981; attended Vermont College. Politics: Liberal Democrat. Religion: Roman Catholic. Memberships: International Sociology Honor Society, Authors Guild, Authors League of

America, Alpha Kappa Delta. Addresses: Home: Newburyport, MA. Agent: Philip G. Spitzer Literary Agency, 788 9th Ave., New York, NY 10019.

Career: Boulder Community Treatment Center, Boulder, CO, counselor, 1982-83; Emerson College, Boston, MA, writing instructor. Worked as a bartender, bounty hunter, prison counselor, actor, and carpenter; appeared in the film *House of Sand and Fog*.

Awards: National Magazine Award for fiction, 1985; American Library Association “notable book” selection, *Los Angeles Times* book award, L.L. Winship/PEN New England Award, and Booksense Book of the Year award, all 2000, for *House of Sand and Fog*.

Andre Dubus III is the son of the well-known short fiction writer of the same name. Dubus has also had success with the short story form, but he is perhaps best known for his novel, *House of Sand and Fog*. *House of Sand and Fog*—which took Dubus four years to write and was turned down by more than twenty publishers before being accepted by Norton—follows the collision course of an ex-Iranian colonel named Behrani and Kathy Nicolo, a young former drug addict whose modest bungalow Behrani purchases during a bank foreclosure auction. Complicating the plot is one of the officers who evicts Kathy, then begins a romantic relationship with her and aids her in the fight to reclaim her house. Although the novel did well after publication, moving to the top of the *New York Times* best-seller list, it became a publishing phenomenon after being chosen by talk show personality Oprah Winfrey as an Oprah Book Club selection.

Book Summary

Source: www.readinggroupguides.com/guides_H/house_of_sand_and_fog1.asp

Colonel Massoud Amir Behrani was once a powerful and respected officer in the Shah of Iran’s air force. Having fled the country with his family, he works by day spearing trash on California highways and by night as a clerk in a convenience store while deceiving his family into believing that he has a loftier job. Now, willing to risk the modest remainder of his fortune to restore his family’s dignity, he buys a small house at a county auction, planning to sell it again for three or four times what he paid. But the house has been auctioned because of a bureaucratic error, and Behrani’s fragile plans are jeopardized when Kathy Nicolo, the owner of the house, begins to protest the sale. A recovering alcoholic and addict, Kathy is desperate to regain her only tie to stability—her home. In doing so, she enlists the help of Deputy Sheriff Lester Burdon, a married man who has fallen precipitously in love with her. As Kathy and Lester become obsessed with seeking justice by whatever means possible, the three characters converge on an explosive collision course. Combining unadorned realism with profound empathy, *House of Sand and Fog* is a devastating exploration of the American Dream gone awry.

Discussion Questions

Source: ReadingGroupGuides.com

1. Do you sympathize more with Kathy Nicolo or with Colonel Behrani in part one of the novel? How does Dubus’s use of alternating first-person narratives affect your response to, and involvement with, the characters?
2. The contested ownership of the house on Bisgrove Street is the fulcrum of the novel’s plot. Who, in your opinion, owns the house once Behrani has paid cash for it? What would be a fair solution to the conflict?
3. What does Kathy’s response to Nick’s desertion reveal about her character? Why does Lester fall in love with Kathy? Is he better for her than Nick was?
4. Where does the hostility between Lester and Behrani spring from? How do their memories—Lester’s of his teenage girlfriend and her brother, Behrani’s of his murdered cousin, Jasmeen—function to reveal the deep emotions that motivate action in this novel?



House of Sand and Fog

Contents and Sign-out Sheet

Kits include one bag, 10 books, and a pocket folder of materials.
Use this sign-out sheet to keep track of who takes which copy of the book. Groups may keep the folder when returning the books and bag.

Copy	Name	Returned
1	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	_____	<input type="checkbox"/>

Due Date:



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